

THE DESCENDANTS OF SIR GEORGE VILLIERS *

By PAUL BLOOMFIELD

AT the present time the public interest in genealogy, such as it is, rather tends to be concentrated on the pedigrees of horses. This subject is suggestive enough. For instance *The Times* of April 8th, 1946, discussing two famous sires of steeplechasers, mentioned that a stallion called Marco was the link between them. "Marco was also the grandsire of Hurry On, who was the grandsire of Bogskar. My Prince was a son of Marcovil, who was by Marco. Cottage's dam, Casetta, was by Marco. It is evident," said *The Times* correspondent, "that the line of Marco still continues to dominate this field of sport."

This is interesting, but how much more interesting if we were to find that the line of some human sire dominated a field humanly even richer than sport. And this is what we do find—a startling discovery, I think, and not only in one case, but in no case more so than that of an Elizabethan gentleman who died in the year 1606 after being married twice and having had five children by each of his wives. You or I might have some occasion for pride if we were descended from him, a probability against which the chances are no more, roughly, than 2,000 to 1. Most people would agree that a 2,000 to 1 winner in the other field I was alluding to would have been worth backing.

Our Elizabethan gentleman's name was Sir George Villiers. It will be suspected that he had something to do with James II's favourite, the Duke of Buckingham. This is correct: he was the Duke's father. I had not heard of him myself till about three years ago, when I came across his name in a paper which Lord Keynes had slipped into a little book mainly about economists.

Lord Keynes had been reading the late Mr. W. T. J. Gun's *Studies in Hereditary Ability*. I was so intrigued that I began looking things up, and the more I looked the more my interest grew. Then I resorted to Galton's *Hereditary Genius*. I was moved to see that that great man had been very warm on the track of this astonishing genealogy, without however once in his epoch-making work mentioning the name of Villiers.

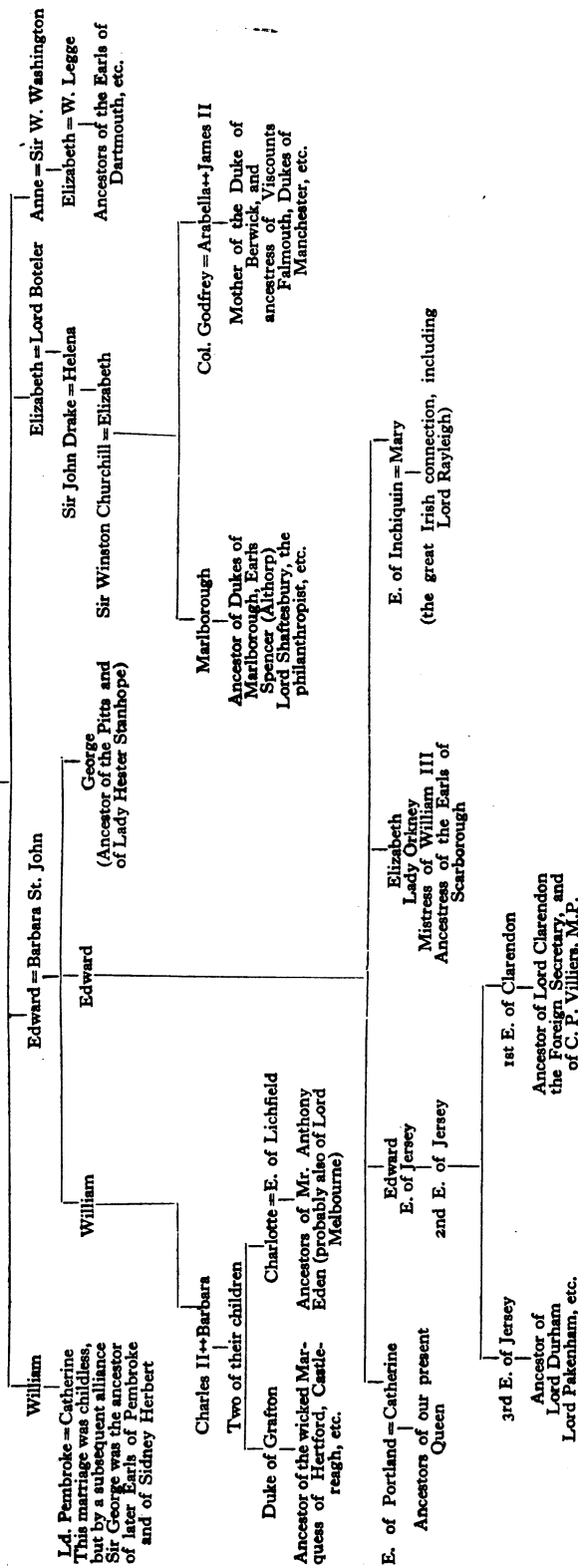
Galton's conviction that a certain general ability is strongly inherited has been amply borne out by science in the last forty years. In his recent report on *Intelligence and Fertility* Sir Cyril Burt says: "There is now overwhelming evidence to show that, of the individual differences revealed by tests of this 'general factor,' the greater amount is due to the individual's innate or inherited constitution." Galton was not on such firm ground when he used the Bach family to illustrate the inheritance of artistic ability. In such matters a man's powers lie more between him and his Muse—or the grace of God. But he was amply justified when he took several groups from the Villiers Connection (though, as I say, without mentioning that name) to prove the persistence of their practical endowments. Let us see what these amounted to.

Sir George Villiers, dying in 1606, was quite unaware of his significance as fountain-head of what Lord Keynes called "the true blood-royal of this country." He was unaware of it because, when he died, his second son by his second marriage—the future Duke—had not yet attracted the king's attention. From the moment he did so the die was cast. To begin with, the leading men or mistresses of the Stuart kings, and of William III, and of Queen Anne, were all descendants of Sir George. This brings us to the most significant fact about the whole Connection, namely that the field in

* Adapted from a broadcast talk given on March 12th, 1947.

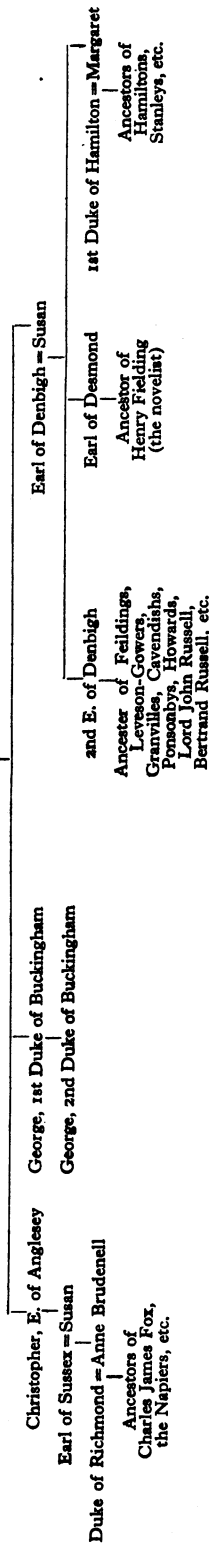
SIR GEORGE VILLIERS = (1st) Audrey Saunders

(Five children, of whom these four married and had descendants)



SIR GEORGE VILLIERS = (2nd) Mary Beaumont

(Five more children, of whom four married and these three left descendants)



which Sir George was a "Marco" was the political field. It is a remarkable tale.

From Walpole to Mr. Attlee there have been forty-two Prime Ministers. Seven of them have been descended from Sir George. Two others in the Connection could have been Prime Minister if they had wanted: a Lord Waldegrave and a Lord Clarendon. The actual seven were Chatham, Portland, Grafton, Pitt, Russell (Lord John, grandfather of Bertrand Russell), Derby, and Mr. Winston Churchill.* Nobody should imagine that this exhausts the Connection. Far from it. Seven Chancellors of the Exchequer trace their line from Sir George, and among the ten Foreign Secretaries of this stock Castlereagh was one and Mr. Eden the last up to date. There have been hardly any administrations without their representatives of Sir George Villiers, the two in the present Labour Government being Lord Listowel and Lord Pakenham.

In a superficial view the ascendancy of Sir George's offspring was less a matter of hereditary ability than (granted certain worldly advantages to start with) of judiciously marrying into other powerful families and having plenty of children. Of course these two things *are* very important. But we cannot so simply account for the way the Villierses swept those kings and queens off their feet and, before long, the whole nation as well. Our first obvious inference from what we know about the inheritance of general ability is that even opportunity is less important than heredity. The point is not that the Villierses were rich and grand, and that they filled high offices. The point is that they were *effective*: intelligent, and singularly apt to pass on their effectiveness to their children. Though to-day we may fairly hope that more equal opportunities will level up people's *condition* we must not jump to rash conclusions beyond that. On any level of society there are greater differences in intelligence and ability between individuals in *that* class than between *their*

average and the average of other classes. What does this indicate where the Villierses are concerned? This: that we should be making a mistake if we underrated their hereditary ability—as by insisting that, after all, in the seventeenth century Buckingham and his cousins had a flying start because capable middle-class men and women were not yet in a position to compete with their social betters. What we should consider is that the Villierses were in competition with an established and powerful community of Cecils, Howards, Talbots, Dudleys, Sidneys and so forth—and really, they won hands down. The two Buckinghams, father and son, were the two most prominent men in England in three reigns. But the versatile, vicious second Duke left no children. The key man was the first Duke, that strange, glamorous figure who so enraged Parliament that he may almost be given credit for the Petition of Right. Buckingham was a shameless nepotist, if one may extend the reference of this word to half-brothers and brothers-in-law. It is, however, necessary to note that being a *successful* nepotist, a successful favourite, required certain outstanding qualities. Robert Carr, who preceded Villiers in the king's affections, lacked those qualities and ended his life in serious disgrace. Villiers was impeached and not long after assassinated, but he held his head high to the end—by which time the nest had been feathered.

Let us see if we have any clue to the developments that followed. It seems clear we have. Many of these people had two qualities among others which leap out at us both from the written and the painted descriptions we have of them. They had great charm. And they had a certain core of toughness. That amazing gold-digger, Barbara Villiers, Duchess of Cleveland, had great beauty as well. We can quite understand why Charles II had a passion for this lady who, by him, was the ancestress of so many eminent people. But it was not the *beauty* of Sir George's great-great-granddaughter, Arabella Churchill, that inflamed James II. Charles rudely said that his brother's confessor must have chosen her for

* Lord Melbourne makes a probable eighth. There seem to be good reasons for believing that his father was Lord Egremont, who was a descendant of Sir George Villiers.

him by way of penance. What Arabella had was the fateful charm—her brother, the great Marlborough, had the looks. Elizabeth Villiers must have had the charm, too: charm and force of personality, or else how should she, with her squint, rather than any of the other, beautiful, talented ladies of the court, have won the austere William III's heart?

We must pass on—to the Pitts and to Fox. Fox like the Younger Pitt was seventh in line of descent from Sir George Villiers. It is astonishing! I am far from wanting to claim any merit if I put my stress here on something that escaped Galton. But the facts are striking. What happened was that a great nabob, nicknamed "Diamond" Pitt, had made a fortune in India. He had a son Robert who became father of the future Chatham. There was evidently plenty of practical ability in the Pitts, but I doubt whether the Pitt character by itself was enough to inspire Chatham, in the crisis of the 1750's, with the conviction that he was the one man who could save England. He said: "I can save this country—and nobody else can." All this I attribute to Robert Pitt having married Harriet Villiers. This is the family in which saving England (in a certain sense) has run since Marlborough's day. It is of genealogical relevance that Harriet's paternal grandparents were cousins: both descended from Sir George.

The Chatham earldom became extinct; the Younger Pitt never married. Eminence is not enough; there have got to be children—and in most Villiers branches there were quiversful. Fox, however, with a certain appropriateness, also died childless—died within a year of Pitt, close to whom he lies buried in Westminster Abbey.

There is no space to say much about the descendants of Sir George who mustered in such force to pass the great Reform Act of 1832, or about the extravagant, brilliant Lord Durham, son of a Villiers mother, who showed the way to turn the British Empire into a Commonwealth of Nations. I ought at least to make some mention, in passing, of the wickedness that has been regarded as a conspicuous feature of the Connection.

There was the bigamous Duchess of Kingston. There was that great rake, the Marquess of Hertford, to whose son and illegitimate grandson we owe the Wallace Collection. There were plenty of others, among them Lady Caroline Lamb—if we can call her wicked. I confess it impresses me to think that the wickedest man and the second-wickedest woman I have known myself were both descended from Sir George. They were both charming, and are both dead now, having died young. They burned the candle at both ends. It would be absurd to take them as having been specially representative of the Connection, though most of the famous ones *have* been worldly—the genes they carry, their special genes, seem to be for that practical general ability which Galton affirmed to be transmissible. Nevertheless the great philanthropist, Lord Shaftesbury, was one of them.

It is an amiable tendency in the public that they like to hear of men and women rising in the world through their own efforts. From Log Cabin to White House: admirable! But surely it should not be thought less of a satisfaction to be able to trace the line of a man who has emerged from obscurity and has the additional social virtue of being able to transmit his valuable qualities to his descendants. We cannot say that Sir George Villiers started from nothing. Perhaps it was the enterprising Villiers who may be presumed to have come over with the Conqueror who was the new variation—who had, I mean, the seed of ability which only ripened five hundred years later. I think the significant ancestor was further back than that, but this is because I am tempted to accept Burke's statement that the family came from L'Isle Adam. A descendant of Sir George however informs me that the earliest forebear of whom he is certain is Alexander de Villiers of Kinalton, who lived in the reign of Henry II.

Before Sir George's time there was a French Villiers who as Grand Master of the Knights of Malta proved himself a remarkable man. Three centuries later his descendant, Count Villiers de l'Isle Adam, was a distinguished writer. One of the pleasures

of genealogy to which I look forward is testing Sir George's link with L'Isle Adam; another is tracing the marriages of the French Villiers women. I shall be surprised if these researches do not turn out rewarding.

We may or may not admire Marco for being a sire of notable steeplechasers. It would be a wretched, backsliding social philosophy—and a highly unscientific one—that made us hesitate to value the emergence of capable and tenacious breeds of men.

For my part, I should be happy to be able to trace my descent to Sir George Villiers. If I had my choice in these matters (not that I am dissatisfied with my own ancestors) I should prefer to Sir George a Quaker gentleman who in 1672 astonished the people of Aberdeen by walking through the streets of their city in sackcloth. *His* name was Robert Barclay, among whose many remarkable descendants was Francis Galton himself.

NOTES AND MEMORANDA

Positive Eugenics: A Proposal

FELLOWS and Members will be interested to know that Dr. C. P. Blacker's contribution to the April 1946 REVIEW under the above title is now available to a wider public. The article has been reprinted in *British Thought 1947*,* an American publication devoted to the "most significant of to-day's writing on such varied themes as Sociology, International Affairs, Literature, Science, Economics, Politics and Art by Britain's most eminent writers and thinkers."

Institute of Sociology

FIELD study meetings will be held in Denmark (island of Als and Copenhagen) from August 15th to 26th, and in Switzerland (Rhône Valley and Berne) from August 14th to 27th.

The annual conference will take place from September 3rd to 10th at Ashburne Hall, University of Manchester, with "Searchlight on Community: theory and practice" as the main subject of discussion. There will be lectures by specialists on the historical, psychological and sociological aspects, and reports on present-day experiments in community. Visits will be arranged to community centres in Manchester. Information may be obtained from the Hon. Organizer of

Field Studies, Le Play House, Ledbury, Herefordshire.

Family

THE new quarterly journal* under this title, edited by Crystal Herbert in collaboration with the Family Relations Group, deserves every success. Founded in the belief that the family tradition is vital to the physical and moral well-being of the nation, and to democracy itself, it will deal with such subjects as education, religion, child welfare, social service and town planning; and with the many problems that arise from a failure of family life, such as child neglect, delinquency and divorce. As an indication of the spirit with which the editor is approaching her task it may be mentioned that she has sought, and been fortunate in securing, the collaboration of Lord Horder and Mr. Cyril Bibby as advisory editors. The journal is pleasant to look at and read, and it may be hoped that before very long there will be enough paper available for it to be produced at shorter intervals and in much larger numbers.

Birthday Honours

Two awards will give particular satisfaction to readers of this REVIEW: the honour of knighthood to Dr. W. Norwood East,

* New York 1947. The Gresham Press Inc. Pp. 461. Price \$3.75.

* Single copies, 1s. 3d.; subscription, 5s. a year.